

## Q16: What is sin?

Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law—resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation.

### 1 John 3:4

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

### Commentary

From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the centre is opened to it. This sin is committed daily by young children and ignorant peasants as well as by sophisticated persons, by solitaries no less than by those who live in society: it is the fall in every individual life, and in each day of each individual life, the basic sin behind all particular sins: at this very moment you or I are either committing it, or about to commit it, or repenting it. We try, when we wake, to lay the new day at God's feet; [but] before we have finished shaving, it becomes our day and God's share in it is felt as a tribute which we must pay out of 'our own' pocket, a deduction from the time which ought, we feel to be 'our own'.

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963). A fellow in English literature at Oxford University as well as chair of English at Cambridge University, Lewis wrote literary criticism, children's literature, fantasy literature, as well as theology. His most well known works are *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. A member of the Church of England, his conversion to Christianity was influenced by his Oxford colleague and friend J.R.R. Tolkien.

From *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940), 70.

### Further Reading

"Sin" in *A Faith to Live By*, by Donald Macleod.

### Prayer

O Lord, deprive me not of thy heavenly blessings.

O Lord, deliver me from eternal torments.

O Lord, if I have sinned in mind or thought, in word or deed, forgive me.

O Lord, deliver me from...littleness of soul and stony hardness of heart.

O Lord, deliver me from every temptation.

O Lord, enlighten my heart which evil desire hath darkened.

O Lord, I, being man, have sinned: do thou, being God, in loving kindness forgive me.

O Lord, send down thy grace to help me, that I may glorify thy holy name.

O Lord Jesus Christ, enroll me thy servant in the book of life.

O Lord my God, even though I have done nothing good in thy sight, yet grant me, according to thy grace, to make a beginning of good.

O Lord, sprinkle on my heart the dew of thy grace.

O Lord of heaven and earth, remember me thy sinful servant, cold of heart and impure, in thy kingdom.

O Lord, receive me in repentance.

O Lord, leave me not.

O Lord, lead me not into temptation.

O Lord, grant me thought of good.

O Lord, grant me tears, a remembrance of death, and a sense of peace.

O Lord, grant me mindfulness to confess my sins.

O Lord, grant me humility, charity, and obedience.

O Lord, grant me endurance, magnanimity, and gentleness.

O Lord, plant in me the root of all blessings, the fear of thee in my heart.

O Lord, vouchsafe that I may love thee with all my heart and soul and in all things obey thy will.

O Lord, shield me from evil men and devils and passions and all other unlawful things.

O Lord, who knowest thy creation and what thou hast willed for it; may thy will also be fulfilled in me a sinner; for thou art blessed for evermore. Amen.

John Chrysostom (347–407). Archbishop of Constantinople, John was born in Antioch. He was given the title Chrysostom which means “golden mouth” because of his eloquent preaching. He is recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church as a saint and Doctor of the Church. Chrysostom is known for his Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and his vast homiletical works including 67 homilies on Genesis, 90 on the Gospel of Matthew, and 88 on the Gospel of John.

From “A Prayer by John Chrysostom: According to the Number of the Hours of the Day and Night” (notice there are 24 of them) in *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), 14–15.

Adapted by Timothy Keller and Sam Shammas from the Reformation catechisms

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**Q15: Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?**

That we may know the holy nature and will of God, and the sinful nature and disobedience of our hearts; and thus our need of a Savior. The law also teaches and exhorts us to live a life worthy of our Savior.

**Romans 3:20**

No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

**Commentary**

After God gave the promise to Abraham, he gave the law to Moses. Why? Simply because he had to make things worse before he could make them better. The law exposed sin, provoked sin, condemned sin. The purpose of the law was...to lift the lid off man's respectability and disclose what he is really like underneath—sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God, and helpless to save himself. And the law must still be allowed to do its God-given duty today. One of the great faults of the contemporary church is the tendency to soft-pedal sin and judgment.... We must never bypass the law and come straight to the gospel. To do so it to contradict the plan of God in biblical history.... No man has ever appreciated the gospel until the law has first revealed him to himself. It is only against the inky blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear, and it is only against the dark background of sin that the gospel shines forth. Not until the law has bruised and smitten us will we admit our need of the gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we pine for Christ to set us free. Not until the law has condemned and killed us will we call upon Christ for justification and life. Not until the law has driven us to despair of ourselves will we ever believe in Jesus. Not until the law has humbled us even to hell will we turn to the gospel to raise us to heaven.

John Stott (1921–2011). An English Anglican preacher who for many years served as rector of All Souls Church in London, Stott was one of the principal framers of the Lausanne Covenant (1974). His numerous books include *Why I Am a Christian* and *The Cross of Christ*.

From *The Message of Galatians* in The Bible Speaks Today Series (London and Downers Grove: IVP, 1968), 93.

## Further Reading

“Law in Action” in *Concise Theology*, by J. I. Packer.

## Prayer

The Lord reveal himself more and more unto us in the face of his Son, Jesus Christ, and magnify the power of his grace...and of his tender mercy encourage us; and persuade us, that since he hath taken us into the covenant of grace, he will not cast us off for those corruptions, which as they grieve his Spirit, so they make us vile in our own eyes: and...the Lord add this to the rest of his mercies...to let the prevailing power of his Spirit in us, be an evidence of the truth of grace begun, and a pledge of final victory, at that time when he will be all in all, in all his, for all eternity. Amen!

Richard Sibbes (1577–1635). An English Puritan theologian, Sibbes was known in London in the early 17th century as "the Heavenly Doctor Sibbes." Preacher at Gray's Inn, London and Master of Catherine Hall, Cambridge, his most famous work is *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (from which this prayer is taken).

From “The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax” in *The Works of the Reverend Richard Sibbes*, Volume 1 (Aberdeen: Chalmers, 1809), 80.

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